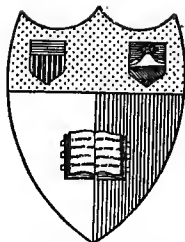


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VERMEER OF DELFT

E. V. LUCAS

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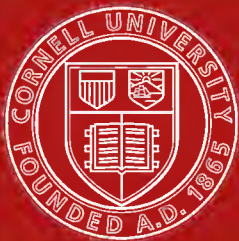
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VERMEER OF DELFT

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Head of a Young Girl
(Mauritshuis, The Hague)

VERMEER OF DELFT

BY
E. V. LUCAS

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
Sir CHARLES J. HOLMES
DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL GALLERY

WITH A FRONTISPIECE IN PHOTOGRAVURE AND
TWELVE OTHER ILLUSTRATIONS

SECOND EDITION

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INTRODUCTION

“**W**HITE Magic !” Among the many happy phrases in which Mr. Lucas has summed up for us the character of Vermeer’s painting, none is more happy than that. It prints on the memory, not only the radiant luminosity of Vermeer’s masterpieces, but also that method so subtle, so impenetrable, by which his bright images are transferred to the canvas.

Let us think of the two words separately, and first of the “whiteness.” What is it in essence but the cool light of day, as we see it through a very large window? Why does its brightness and coolness make so vivid an impression upon us? Surely because we seldom see Vermeer’s paintings except among pictures by his great contemporaries. Their tones and methods are different, though De Hooch, at his best, now and then comes near to Vermeer in truth and vigour. Their almost universal practice is to paint things as seen in a room, either with a small window

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(as Rembrandt loved to see them) or where the light of a large window is modified by curtains or by buildings close at hand. The result is a very strong illumination upon the figures and objects close to the window, while all that is farther away is rapidly merged in shadow. So Maes and Metsu and Terborch and the rest paint the atmosphere of a room as a delicately tinted mist which envelops and softens everything but the chief focus of attraction. Look, for example, at Metsu's "Duet" (No. 838) in the National Gallery: it could not in its way be more vivid or more delightful. Then turn to the Salting Vermeer (No. 2568) which just now hangs next to it—a picture often spoken of with a certain condescension, as being indubitably less brilliant in tone, and less arresting in design than several of the painter's more famous works. In a moment you will see that the atmosphere and tone of the Vermeer, though quiet, perhaps just a little too quiet, are absolute nature, while the Metsu, with all its dexterous pretence of realism, is not realistic at all. The room is filled, not with air, but with an exquisite brown fog.

Vermeer, in fact, was in one respect like our own Constable. He saw that air was clear and

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transparent, that light could be cool and fresh, and with the search for these attributes came other discoveries. Cool light produced delightful and unexpected tones of cool colour ; yellow and blue in particular were transmuted into hues incomparable. Again, through the clear luminous air of his well-lit painting-room, the occupants combined into fascinating silhouette patterns with the pictures, the maps, the furniture and the lines of the doors and windows. The subtle balancing of the lines and masses in these arabesques, the finding of proportions at once audacious and impeccable between the component parts, coupled all the while with an exact atmospheric perspective, so that the painting should be as perfect in its three-dimensional quality as in its pattern :—these became Vermeer's preoccupations. Was it merely a coincidence that he lived in Delft ? Or is it possible that a sight of some of the Oriental importations for the use of the famous Delft potteries showed Vermeer the path to this new vision ? His famous blues and yellows may well have been thus inspired, for did not Tiepolo, a century later, learn the secret of those colours from *Chinoiserie* ? And as Japanese prints kindled the Paris of Manet and Whistler fifty years ago, so similar sparks

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may have fallen on Holland in the seventeenth century, and found only the lamp of Vermeer's genius prepared for them.

The technical problems involved by this novel vision were unknown to the Low Countries. Their traditional method, the use of a foundation of transparent brown into which touches of more positive colour were crisply worked, with infinite craft by Metsu and Terborch, with marvellous vigour by Rembrandt and Rubens, was bankrupt in face of Vermeer's requirements. The crystalline purity of light on white walls or linen, the adjustment of contours and edges as trimly and precisely as the camera shows them to us to-day, the making of tones as flat and simple and solid as nature exhibits to the unsophisticated eye, and, last and most difficult of all, the suppression of every trace of human handiwork which might intervene between the spectator and complete optical illusion—such were his demands. And allied with these almost scientific ideals there was in Vermeer a spirit of refined aloofness, of leisurely aristocratic distinction, which lifts him high above his clever, but for the most part rather homely, colleagues.

His magic is seen to the full only in a few pictures, where his aristocratic temper and his scientific



THE YOUNG COURTESAN

THE GALLERY, DRESDEN

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ideas are fused in perfect harmony. Mr. Lucas has spoken of them better than I could ever do, though I should like to put in a plea for the Windsor picture being included among the masterpieces. It is certainly one of the most grand and spacious of all Vermeer's designs, and if the varnish were skilfully treated, it would prove to be as brilliant as it is subtle. The infinite gradations of tone and atmosphere, the clarity of illumination, the exquisite adjustment of each mass to its neighbour, with just so much softness or crispness as nature presents, which are characteristic of these masterpieces, are qualities which could be obtained only by a smooth and precise method of work. This in turn compelled painting on a small scale, and the sacrifice of such effects as those obtained in the Dresden "Courtesan." Free and forcible handling with its inevitable accidents of texture would at once dispel the illusion of naturalness. So the perfect works of Vermeer are mosaics of enamelled pigment of small or moderate size, each section fitted precisely to its neighbour, each absolutely just in relative value, and bearing no trace of what painters call "brushwork," except at points where relief and emphasis, life and spirit, were specially needed. We can see where, at the

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last, the master touched in a ribbon, the high lights on a satin dress or a pearl, but we can only guess, and that rather vaguely, at the magic of the preceding stages.

But guess we can. Look again, for example, at the Salting picture in the National Gallery, and note the marbling of the instrument at which the lady is seated, and the indication of a picture hanging on the wall behind her. In these two passages we see flat tones laid neatly side by side, and I feel certain that the mature works of Vermeer were started with just such a mosaic of simple tones, all suggestion of structure by the direction of the brush strokes being carefully avoided. In some cases the underpainting would appear to have been bluish, or at least a very cool grey. In our delightful standing figure (No. 1383) the ground is that fine old traditional ground *terre-verte*, followed in due course by umber. The method, in fact, is exactly similar to that employed by Michelangelo in his early "Madonna with St. John and Angels" (No. 809), as a moment's comparison will prove. But the substance and surface and quality of the edges would surely have shown some trace of brushwork, had they not been treated by a softening or polishing process at each stage?

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Such processes were common in highly specialized crafts like the coach-painting of the past, and if Vermeer employed or adapted one of them we should understand why his pictures grew to perfection so slowly, and why his output was so small. It is noticeable that his craftsmanship never falters over still-life or draperies which could be painted from a lay figure. The heads and faces of his sitters, which could not be kept so still, not infrequently seem to have given trouble, and to be handled with less certainty than the rest of the picture. There can be no doubt, at any rate, that his "magic" was the result of a very elaborate process, and one which the painter was slow in learning.

Those who have borne with me thus far will recognize that here we have grounds for assigning relative dates to a considerable portion of Vermeer's work. The pictures in which this technical magic is perfectly developed must be mature; those in which he hesitates and is evidently seeking his way must be, in comparison, youthful. Let us consider a few of them.

The evidence of tradition is supported by a drawing in the British Museum¹ which indicates a close

¹ See *Burlington Magazine*, January, 1903, p. 327.

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connexion between the School of Rembrandt and the young Vermeer, when he was painting the "Christ in the House of Mary and Martha," now at Skelmorlie Castle. The Italo-Dutch influences in the "Diana at her Toilet," and the Venetian influence in the Dresden "Courtesan" are indications of experimental work in other directions. The latter picture indeed, both in colour and design, achieves real success, and work on this scale must have been abandoned, probably for the reason already given, with no small reluctance. Certain technical analogies make me feel that the famous "View of Delft" at The Hague, and the "Street in Delft" from the Six Collection, are not much later in date. In these we find that unswerving sincerity of vision which separates Vermeer from all his contemporaries, combined with technical methods not unlike theirs. "The Girl Asleep" in the Altman Collection is another illustration of the transition period. The modelling of the head is still like that of the girl in the Dresden "Courtesan," the half-tones are warm and treated in traditional Dutch fashion, but in the background we see already the development of fresh air painting combined with pattern. The Dresden "Girl Reading a Letter," and two or three other pictures, which

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are heavy and brownish in the half-tones, represent the next stage of growth. At the end of it I fancy must come that monumental figure, the "Maid-servant Pouring Milk," at Amsterdam. Here we have the work of the student become master, sound, solid, luminous; but still, it would seem, the achievement of one doing quite perfectly a thing known, visible and tangible, rather than of one venturing upon the unknown. It is that, the element of surprise, of daring, of the unexpected, which contributes so much to the attraction of Vermeer's later masterpieces, to his "White Magic," which Mr. Lucas has described with such felicitous enthusiasm.

C. J. H.

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I

THE outstanding surprise—to those visitors to the exhibition of Dutch painting in the Salle of the Jeu de Paume in the Tuileries in the spring of 1921—was the work of Jan Vermeer of Delft. The Rembrandts astonished by their number and their sombre power; the other masters, ancient and modern, from Nicolas Maes to Matthew Maris, from Jan Steen to Van Gogh, had each his devotees; but it was the three Vermeers that provoked the exclamations of wonder and delight: the “View of Delft,” with its golden placidity and charm; the “Maid servant Pouring Milk,” at once so small and so big, with no detail neglected and yet its effect one of massive breadth; and, most of all, the “Head of a Young Girl,” that marvel of paint, that miracle of sweetness and light. From morning till evening there was a crowd of worshippers at this shrine.

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Until the Dutch Exhibition the stay-at-home Parisian (and to stay at home is an honourable Parisian habit) had had the opportunity of studying Vermeer only in the single, but perfect, example in the Louvre: the "Dentellière" or "Lace-Maker." Possibly before the Dutch Exhibition this exquisite picture may have won—so tiny and modest is it—less than its share of attention. But now and henceforth its popularity is secure: visitors to the Louvre will love it not only for its own sake, but as a reminder of those other works from the same magical brush. "Ah!" they will say, "superb, is she not? But you should have seen the 'Head of a Young Girl'!" And their eyes will fill with tears.

It is because of this conquest of Paris by Vermeer of Delft that I have expanded an article on the painter which I wrote in 1911 under the title "On the Track of Vermeer," in the hope that it may satisfy some of the curiosity which is felt about this rare and enigmatical master.

II

Jan Vermeer, or Van der Meer, was born in Delft and baptized there on October 31, 1632.

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His father was Reynier Janszoon Vermeer, and his mother Dingnums Balthasars. On April 20th, 1653, he married, also in Delft, Catherina Bolenes. How many children they had I do not know: it is stated ten, but eight survived him, all under age.

It is generally believed that Karel Fabritius, himself a pupil of Rembrandt and a painter of extraordinary distinction, was Vermeer's instructor; but the period of tuition must have been very short, for Fabritius became a member of the Delft Guild in 1652, before which year he was not qualified to teach, and he was dead in 1654, killed by a powder explosion. A poem on the death of this distinguished painter by a Delft writer has a stanza to the effect that from the ashes of that Phoenix rose Vermeer. There is very little of the work of Fabritius to be seen; but his charming "Siskin," a small picture of the little, musical, shy bird, painted with the breadth that is commonly kept for auguster subjects, hangs by Vermeer's "Head of a Young Girl" at The Hague, and it would alone prove Fabritius to have possessed not only strength but sweetness; while such other pictures from his hand as can be identified—they are reproduced in Dr. Hofstede de Groot's monograph on the two Phoenixes—show that he was an extraordinarily

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interesting painter. And here a few dates may be valuable to keep in mind : Rembrandt, 1606-1669 ; Fabritius, *circa* 1624-1654 ; Vermeer, 1632-1675.

Dr. Hofstede de Groot thinks that Vermeer may have had an Italian master as well as a Dutch, and it is easy to believe. I had, indeed, with none of Dr. de Groot's knowledge, entertained a similar conjecture ; and in the huddle of pictures in one of the rooms of the Academy at Vienna I even found a copy of an Italian picture—a Correggio, I think—which Vermeer's hand might easily have made, so luminous and liquid is it. That he visited Italy is more than unlikely—practically impossible ; but to gain that Venetian something which his works occasionally discover there was no necessity for him to have done so, for the Dutch collected foreign works, and Italian painters settled in Holland in some numbers.

The facts about Vermeer are singularly few, considering the high opinion in which he was held in his town. Almost the only intimate thing told of him is the story of his unpaid bread bill, as recounted by De Monconys, the French traveller. De Monconys visited him in 1663 and wanted to buy a picture, but none could be found in the artist's house. Vermeer's baker offered, however, to sell



THE ARTIST IN HIS STUDIO
COUNT CZERNIN, VIENNA

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one which was hanging on his wall and for which he asked 300 florins ; but the Frenchman would not give so much, his idea of the value of a Vermeer being two hundred and fifty florins fewer. After the artist's death, it is told, the baker's overdue account of 3,176 florins was liquidated by two pictures. The poverty suggested by this state of affairs is the more difficult to believe in when we remember that Vermeer's wife had rich relations and that from time to time she is known to have come into money, and also that Vermeer's prices are said to have been higher than those of any other painter except Gerard Dou. But we must bear in mind several circumstances. One is that Vermeer was an artist, and artists are not, as a rule, either great administrators or astute financiers. Another is that he was highly fastidious and probably worked only as he wished, did not hasten, and was as likely as not to tell a client to take it or leave it. A third, that he had many children, ten or eight, and even eight children can make quite a substantial income look very foolish. It is probable that not all his capricious industry nor Frau Vermeer's occasional windfalls could keep pace with the young Vermeers' appetites ; and one result was the long score against the household in the baker's books.

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It is also known, no matter how exalted his reputation among fellow artists—he was elected a “ Master ” of St. Luke’s Guild when only twenty-one—that Vermeer was not a popular painter with the patrons of his day. That he should not have been desired may be a mystery to us ; but of such mysteries the records of painting are full. Many are in existence at this moment. An even greater mystery, to me, is the fact that dealers saddled with Vermeers (could there be, to our ears, a stranger phrase ?) had, in order to find purchasers for them, to make-believe that they were painted by other and more desired artists, chiefly Peter de Hooch (1630–1681). How any one scrutinising with any care the work of the two men could ever mistake one for the other is bewildering. Gabriel Metsu (1630–1667) and Nicolas Maes (1632–1693) were also used as stalking-horses ; which means, of course, that there must have been some jugglery with Vermeer’s signature, laying, indeed, all evidence based on his signature under suspicion.

But I doubt if Vermeer allowed poverty to vex him. His work gives less indication of being done under conditions of stress or anxiety than any that I know. Of all the painters of the world none less suggests necessity than Jan Vermeer of Delft : on

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the contrary, his work carries with it the idea of aristocracy, prosperity and fastidiousness rarely associated with the father of a large family's struggle for existence. That he must have carried off his want of pence with an air is, I think, practically proved by the fact that the Guild of St. Luke elected him as its Chief on four several occasions. You can see that he was placid: the fact shines in every picture. He was placid and he liked others to be placid, too. His wife (if, as I conjecture, it was she who sat for certain of his pictures) was placid; his daughters (if, as I conjecture, certain of his models were his daughters) were placid; his other sitters were placid. His one undisputed landscape shows that he wanted nature to be placid; his one street scene has the dove brooding over it.

None the less, even though he took things easily, Vermeer must have made some effort to keep up his credit, because the equable baker was not all. What of the butcher and the shoemaker, the tailor and the dressmaker? And what of the landlord? And the vintner? The inference—especially when it is remembered that the baker occasionally agreed to be paid in kind and hang we know not which of the masterpieces on his wall—the inference there-

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fore is that Vermeer painted, was forced by necessity to paint, many pictures in excess of the very small number—thirty-seven or thirty-eight—at the present moment identifiable. Of this, more later ; but I want to bring out the point here, since it is of the highest importance and might indeed completely alter the life of millionaires.

We may, from several circumstances, believe Vermeer to have been a home-keeping man. One is that not only was he born in Delft (in 1632) but he married in Delft (in 1653) and died in Delft (in 1675) ; another, that the years in which he was a chief of the Delft Guild, and therefore a resident there, were 1662, 1663, 1670 and 1671 ; and another, that his only famous landscape and his only known street scene are both Delft subjects.

When I add that Vermeer died on December 13, 1675, at the early age of 43, and that his executor was Antony van Leeuwenhoek, the inventor of the microscope (and probably his model for the three or four scientific pictures), I have said all that is known for certain of his career.

III

To me it is not to Andrea del Sarto that the title of "The Perfect Painter" belongs, but to Jan



THE PEARL NECKLACE
KAISER FRIEDRICH MUSEUM, BERLIN

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Vermeer of Delft. Andrea, with all his weakness, was in a way greater than that : he had, one can see, finer thoughts, sweeter imaginings, a richer nature than a perfect painter needs ; the phrase perfect painter limits him to the use of his brush, and one thinks of him (and not wholly because Browning was a man of genius) always as a human being too. But of Vermeer we know nothing save that he was a materialistic Dutchman who applied paint to canvas with a dexterity and charm that have never been equalled : in short, with perfection. His pictures tell us that he was not imaginative and not unhappy ; they do not suggest any particular richness of personality : there is nothing in them or in his life to inspire a poet as Andrea and Lippo Lippi inspired Browning and as Romney inspired Tennyson. Vermeer was not like that.

But when it comes to perfection in the use of paint, when it comes to "The Perfect Painter"—why, here he is. His contemporary, Rembrandt of the Rhine (whose hand has been traced by the experts in nearly seven hundred paintings), is a giant beside him ; but ruggedness was part of his strength. His contemporary, Franz Hals of Haarlem, could dip his brush in red and transform the

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pigment into pulsating blood with one flirt of his wrist ; and yet think of his splendid carelessness elsewhere. His contemporary, Jan Steen of Leyden, had a way of kindling with a touch an eye so that it danced with vivacity and dances still, after all these years ; but what a sloven he could be in his backgrounds ! His contemporary, Peter de Hooch (to whom, as I have said, for two purblind centuries, Vermeer's pictures were chiefly attributed), could flood canvas with the light of the sun, but how weakly drawn are some of his figures ! And so one might go on with the other great painters—the Italians and the Spanish and the English and the French, naming one after another, all with more to them as personalities than Vermeer, - all doing more work, yet all, even Michelangelo and Leonardo, even Correggio, even Raphael, even Andrea, even Chardin (who was, so to speak, Vermeer's love-child), falling beneath him in the mere technical mastery of the brush and the palette—no one having with such accuracy and happiness adjusted the means to the desired end. Vermeer aimed low, but at his best he stands as near perfection as is possible.

It is this joyful mastery that fascinates me and made it so natural, when in the autumn of 1907 I

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was casting about for a motive for a holiday, to say, "Let us pursue this painter, let us see in twenty-one days all the Vermeers that we can."

IV

The farthest European city containing an undisputed Vermeer being Vienna, we went there first ; and there was a certain propriety in doing so, for in the Vienna picture the artist is supposed to have painted himself, and to begin with a concept of him was interesting and proper. The "Maler" was at Count Czernin's, a comfortable mansion at Number 9 Landes-gerich strasse, which in those peaceful times was thrown open to visitors on Mondays and Thursdays. To-day (1921) all this has probably changed ; but the Vermeer, I am told, is still there. There were four rooms of pictures, and nothing in them mattered very much save the Vermeer. An elderly butler was on duty, to show you the best place to stand in, to bring a chair, and murmur such facts about the marvellous work as appealed most to his imagination—not so much that it was a miracle of painting as that it was acquired for a mere song, and that Americans constantly walked into the room with blank cheques in their hands and entreated the Count to fill them up at his

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pleasure. But no, the owner was too proud of his possession. Well, I admired him for it, and I admire him even more to-day, when Austria is so poor.

The picture may not have such radiance as the "Pearl Necklace" at Berlin, or such greatness as the "Maid servant Pouring Milk," or such sheer lovely beauty as the Mauritshuis "Head of a Young Girl," but it is brilliant and satisfying. It does not give me such pleasure as certain others to be named later, but it is, in some ways, perhaps finer. Vermeer—if it is he—is seated at his easel with his back to the world: a largish man, with long hair under a black velvet cap, and the careful costume of a man who can pay for his bread. Nor does the studio suggest poverty. The artist is at work on the head of a demure damsel whom he has posed near the window, with the light falling upon her, of course from the left. The little mousy thing has a wreath of leaves in her hair and a large book held to her breast; in her right hand is a long musical instrument. She is probably one of the artist's daughters. Her features have a resemblance to those of other of his sitters.

On the wall is the most fascinating of the many



VIEW OF DELFT
MAURITSHUIS, THE HAGUE

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maps that the artist painted—with twenty little views of Dutch towns in the border. Vermeer was the first to see the decorative possibilities that lie in cartography.

The beautiful blue Danube had so little water in it at the time of my stay in Vienna that the voyage to Budapest would have taken almost twice as long as it should, and there was not time. To make the journey by train, just for one day, was an unbearable thought at that moment, although I now regret that I did not go. The Budapest Vermeer is a portrait, a Dutch Vrouw, standing, looking full at the world, without any accessories whatever. Not having seen it I can express no opinion as to its authorship, but I know experts who are convinced that only Vermeer painted it. Dr. de Groot, although doubtful, reproduces the picture in his book among the practical certainties. So also does M. Vanzype, who goes farther and includes the portrait of a young man in the Brussels Gallery, for which the curator, M. A. J. Wauters, has made out a very eloquent case, but which Herr Bredius of the Mauritshuis and Dr. de Groot both repudiate. For myself, all I can say of it is that one does not jump to the denial of it as one did to the putative example in our National Gallery, now completed by the

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addition of its lost half and given to Michael Schweertz.

The Budapest Vermeer is, as the reproduction proves, a beautiful picture—a youngish Dutch woman with the inevitable placidity, but not so open and easy-going as the personalities whom the artist chose for his own pictures : she has folded hands and large white cape and cuffs. M. Vanzype admits that this portrait and that of the young man at Brussels lend colour to the theory of Thoré and M. Arsène Alexandre that Vermeer studied for a while immediately under Rembrandt ; but he goes on to show that this was practically an impossibility. A recent acquisition in the National Gallery called “ The Philosopher,” by Rembrandt (No. 3214), might, however, very easily be employed to support that theory, for the lighting is Vermeer’s own. Not impossibly it was the property of Karel Fabritius and Vermeer saw it in his studio.

Turning reluctantly away from Budapest we went next to Dresden, which has two Vermeers. The famous Raphael is, of course, Dresden’s lodestar, and next come the Correggios, and there is a triptych by Jan Van Eyck and a man in armour by Van Dyck ; but it is of Vermeer of whom we are talking, and the range of Vermeer cannot be understood at

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all unless one sees him in the capital of Saxony. For it is here that his "Young Courtesan" (chastely softened by the modest Baedeker into "The Young Connoisseur") is found. It is a large picture, for him, nearly five feet by four, and it represents a buxom, wanton girl, of a ripe beauty, dressed in a lace cap and hood and a bright yellow bodice, considering the value of the *douceur* which a roystering Dutchman is offering her. Behind is an old woman curious as to the result (the picture is sometimes called "The Procuress"), and beside her is another roysterer, whose face might easily be that unseen one of the artist in the Czernin picture, and who is wearing a similar cap and slashed sleeves. The party stand on a balcony, over the railing of which has been flung one of the heavy tapestries on which Dutch painters loved to spend their genius. The picture is remarkable as being a new thing in Vermeer's career and, indeed, a new thing in Dutch art; and it also shows that, had Vermeer liked, he might have done more with drama, for the faces of the two women are expressive and true; although, such was his incorrigible fastidiousness, his preference for the distinguished and radiant to the exclusion of all else, that he cannot make them either ugly or objectionable. The procuress is a Vermeer

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among procuresses, the courtesan a Vermeer among courtesans. The fascination of the canvas, though totally different from that of any of his others, is equal to any : it has a large, easy power, as well as being a sumptuous and daring adventure in colour. It is the work of a Dutch genius who has admired the Venetians.

Herr Martin has pointed out a change of mind in this picture. The young courtesan originally wore a large white lace collar, but the artist reduced the collar in size and removed the lace. In the " View of Delft " are traces of another *pentimento*, as these changes of mind are called. There was once an additional figure in the foreground.

The date of " The Young Courtesan "—1656—is the only one in any Vermeer picture which Dr. Hofstede de Groot accepts as genuine, and it convinces him that the pictures at Skelmorlie and Budapest were painted at about the same time. Other experts have other views.

The second Dresden picture is also a little off Vermeer's usual path. The subject is familiar : the Dutchwoman reading a letter by a table ; the light comes through the same window and falls on the same white wall ; but the tone of the work is distinct, sombre green prevailing. It would be



MAIDSERVANT POURING MILK
RIJKSMUSEUM, AMSTERDAM

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thrilling to own this picture, but I do not rank it for allurements or satisfaction with the best. Anything below the highest standard—such is the fastidiousness which this man's fastidiousness engenders—quickly disappoints; although the student working up to the best and reaching the best last would be continually enraptured.

Next, Berlin. After the "Head of a Young Girl" at the Mauritshuis, which among the figures comes always first with me, and the "View of Delft," it is, I think, the Berlin "Pearl Necklace" that is Vermeer's most enchanting work. The white wall in this painting is beautiful beyond the power of words to express. It is so wonderful that if one were to cut out a few square inches of this wall alone and frame them one would have a joy for ever. Franz Hals' planes of black have never been equalled, but Vermeer's planes of white seem to me quite as unapproachable. The whole picture has radiance and light and delicacy; painters gasp before it. It has more, too: it is steeped in a kind of white magic, as the "View of Delft" is steeped in the very radiance of the evening sun. I hope (I wrote in 1911) that when we have fought Germany in the inevitable war of which the papers are so consistently full, it will be part of the indemnity. And

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now (adding to this in 1921) I would urge the British Government to take "The Pearl Necklace" as full payment and get to work again.

The other Vermeer in the superb gallery over which Dr. Bode then presided with such dangerous enthusiasm (dangerous, I mean, to poorer rival galleries) is not so remarkable; but it is burnt into my memory: that white Delft jug I shall never forget. The woman drinking, with her face seen through the glass as Terburg would have done it (one likes to see painters excelling now and again at each other's mannerisms); the rich figure of the Dutch gentleman watching her; the room with its chequered floor: all these I can visualize without an effort: the retina never loses it. Vermeer, true ever to his native town and home, painted this jug several times. Not so often as Metsu, but with a greater touch. You find it notably again in the King's example at Windsor Castle.

Berlin then had also a private Vermeer, which I did not see—Herr Simon's "Mistress and Servant." Judging by the photogravure, this must be magnificent; and it is peculiar in respect of being almost the only picture in which the painter has a plain table-cloth in place of the usual heavily-patterned tapestry. The lady, in yellow and ermine and

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pearls, is evidently ordering dinner ; the placid, pleasant maid has a hint of Maes. The picture is now in the Frick Collection in New York.

Two other pictures I also ought to have seen before leaving Germany—one at Brunswick and one at Frankfort. In the Brunswick painting a coquetish girl takes a glass of wine from a courteous Dutch gentleman at the table, while a sulky Dutch gentleman glooms in the background. On the table is another of the white Delft jugs. The Frankfort picture is “The Geographer at the Window,” which in the reproduction strikes one as a most beautiful and dignified work. The geographer—probably Antony van Leeuwenhoek—leans at his lighted table over a chart, with his compasses in his hand. All the painter’s favourite accessories are here—the heavy tapestry on the table, the window with its small panes, the streaming light of day, the white wall, the chair with its brass-headed nails. And the kind, thoughtful face of the geographer makes the whole thing human and humane. Vermeer, I fancy, was never more harmonious than here. He has three other pictures in which the same figure occurs, but I have not seen them. One belongs to Baron Alphonse de Rothschild ; another is now in America ; another is said to be in Belgium.

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It is interesting to note that Van Leeuwenhoek was also painted by Maes, whose work so often was confused with Vermeer's. The portrait is No. 2581 in the National Gallery.

At Amsterdam we went first to the sombre mansion of the Six family at number 511 Heerengracht, one of the most beautiful and reserved of the canals. A ring at the bell brought a rosy and spotless maid to the door, and she left us for a little while in a lobby from which Vermeer might have chosen his pictures' blue tiles, until a butler led the way upstairs to the little gallery. I am writing of 1907, before the negotiations for the purchase by the State of the "Maid-servant Pouring Milk" were completed, and I therefore saw it in its natural home, where it had been for two hundred and more years. But since then, at a cost of 500,000 florins at twelve to the pound (or at nearly £155 a square inch) it has passed to the Ryks. The price sounds beyond reason, but it is not. Granted that a kind and portly Dutchwoman at work in her kitchen is a subject for a painter, here it is done with such mastery, sympathy and beauty as not only to hold one spellbound but to be beyond appraisal. No sum is too much for the possession of this unique work—unique not only in Vermeer's career (so far



STREET IN DELFT
RIJKSMUSEUM, AMSTERDAM

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as we are aware) but in all painting. What the artist would have asked for it we do not know. At the sale of his works in 1696 it brought 175 florins.

Vermeer here is at his most vigorous and powerful. His other works are notable above everything for charm: such a picture as "The Pearl Necklace" at Berlin represents the ecstasy of perfection in paint; but here we find strength too. I never saw a woman more firmly set upon canvas; I never saw a bodice that was so surely filled with a broad and beating bosom. Only a very great man could so paint that quiet, capable face. Some large pictures are very little, and some small pictures are large. This "Maid servant Pouring Milk" is only eighteen inches by fifteen, but it is to all intents and purposes a full length: on no life-size canvas could a more real and living woman be painted. When you are at Amsterdam you cannot give this picture too much attention; be sure to notice also the painting of the hood and the drawing of the still life, especially the jug and the bowl. It was this picture, one feels, that shone before the dear Chardin, all his life, as a star.

The other Vermeer in the Six mansion was the "Street in Delft"—"Het Straatge" or "The

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Little Street"—which artists adore. The charm of it is not to be communicated by words, or at any rate by words of mine. It is as though Peter de Hooch had known sorrow, and, emerging triumphant and serene, had begun to paint again. And yet that is, of course, not all; for De Hooch, with all his radiant tenderness, had not this man's native aristocracy of mind, nor could any suffering have given it to him. Like the "View of Delft," like the "Young Courtesan," this picture is isolated, not only in Vermeer's record, but in the art of all time. Many grow the flower now—there is a modern Dutch painter, Breitner, whose whole career is an attempt to reproduce the spirit of this façade—but the originator still stands alone and apart, as indeed, by God's sense of justice, originators are usually permitted to. The sale of twenty-one of Vermeer's pictures at Amsterdam in 1696 included the "Street in Delft" which the Six family owned, and also a view of houses, a smaller work, which fetched forty-eight florins, and which has disappeared. In the spring of 1921 the "Street in Delft" was put up for auction. It was later offered to the Louvre at an immense figure—£70,000 sterling was mentioned as the price—and then suddenly was withdrawn from France and presented to Holland by Sir

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Henry Deterding. Its permanent home is the Ryks Museum at Amsterdam.

The Ryks Vermeers were, in 1907, two (now made four by the "Maid servant Pouring Milk" and the "Street in Delft"); and, of these, one I do not like, however much I am astounded by its dexterity, and one I could never tire of. The picture that I do not like, "The Love Letter," shows, with the "New Testament Allegory" at The Hague, the painter in his most dashing mood of virtuosity. Neither has charm, but both have a masterful dexterity that not only leaves one bewildered but kills all the other *genre* painters in the vicinity. Both were painted, I should guess, to order, and do not represent the painter's own choice of subject. It is conjectured by Herr Martin that "The Love Letter" represents the artist's studio, as it contains several articles that, from an inventory which has survived we know he possessed. The inventory also includes a stone table for grinding colours, seven ells of gold leather hangings, a landscape, a sea piece, and a large picture of the Crucifixion. The leather and the Crucifixion both occur in the "New Testament Allegory"; and there is a landscape and a sea piece in "The Love Letter." There are landscapes in other Ver-

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meers, too. The identification of all the pictures within Vermeer's pictures would indeed make an absorbing exercise in sleuthing for a Lecoq of art.

The other Ryks picture—the “ Woman Reading a Letter ”— gives us the essential Vermeer again in all his delicacy and quietude. It was the first of his best pictures that I ever saw—before the expedition which began with Vienna—and I fell under his spell instantly. What I have said of the “ Maidservant Pouring Milk ” applies also to the “ Woman Reading a Letter ” ; she becomes in time a full length. The picture is only twenty inches by sixteen, but the woman also takes her place in the memory as life-size. It is one of the simplest of all the works, comparable with the “ Pearl Necklace,” but a little simpler still. And yet, of course, there was nothing really simple about Vermeer. His apparent simplicity is the result of endless toil and conscientious purpose. The woman's face has been injured, but it does not matter ; you don't notice it after a moment ; her intent expression remains ; her gentle contours are unharmed. The jacket she wears is the most beautiful blue in Holland ; the map is a yellowish brown ; the wall is white.

The woman reading, whose condition obviously is interesting, is, I like to think, the vrouw Vermeer,



WOMAN READING A LETTER
RIJKSMUSEUM, AMSTERDAM

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the mother of the young girls in the pictures at The Hague, Vienna, and Brussels. If we knew this for certain, we should be able to use the information towards the solution of a problem which perplexes all the Vermeer experts, namely: At what stage in his career did he paint certain pictures? Mr. Roger Fry thinks that Vermeer began in the grand manner—with the “Diana” at The Hague and the “Christ” at Skelmorlie Castle—and gradually resigned himself to the narrower but more popular scope of Dutch genre. Mr. George Clausen, R.A., himself an exquisite painter, thinks just the reverse. Dr. Hofstede de Groot believes that the pictures with the little spots of high light—such as the “View of Delft” and the “Street in Delft”—came early. But even the layman may be permitted to be surprised by this judgment. The “Maid servant Pouring Milk,” for example, which has these spots, suggests the completest, maturest power. This thing alone is certain: we shall never know. But the exercise of conjecture is one of life’s pleasantest alleviations.

Even the dated “Geographer” at Frankfort—1668—tells us nothing, for the date is not taken seriously. But were the year correct, there would still have been time for the painter, before he died, in 1675, to change his style. Supposing that, as is

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extremely probable, the "Young Girl" at the Mauritshuis was one of the painter's daughters, we can get approximately at a year. Vermeer was married in 1653. Say that the child was his eldest, born in 1654. In the picture she is a girl of perhaps sixteen: that gives us 1670 as its date. If the girl in the Duke of Arenberg's picture at Brussels is her sister—and they have many points of similarity—we can get at the date of that picture too, and also of the "Lady seated at the Virginals" in the National Gallery—No. 2568—for the musician is clearly the same child. But if these girls were not Vermeer's daughters, then we are again lost.

As to how Vermeer worked, the experts also differ. Of such mysteries I know nothing, but I was present recently at a meeting of artists convened to discuss Vermeer's genius, and I listened to their various theories and watched their eloquent hands. One held that Vermeer painted direct from life; another, that he made one drawing only, on his canvas, and built up on that. One was convinced that under all his high tones is a lower. Such unfamiliar words to me as "impasto" and "scumble" filled the air; but we came out by the same door wherein we went.

The Hague is the most comfortable city that I

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know in which to see pictures. It is so light and open, the "Oude Doelen" is so pleasant an hotel, and the pictures to see are so few—just a handful of old masterpieces at the Mauritshuis and just a handful of the romantics at the Mesdag Museum. That is all : no formal galleries, no headaches. Above all, there are here the two most beautiful Vermeers that are known—the "Head of Young Girl" and the "View of Delft." Writing in another place some years ago I ventured to call the Mauritshuis picture of a girl's head "one of the most beautiful things in Holland." I retract that statement now and, instead, say quite calmly that it is *the* most beautiful thing in Holland. And to me it is in many ways not only the most beautiful thing in Holland but the most satisfying and exquisite product of brush and colour that I have anywhere seen. The painting of the lower lip is as much a miracle to me as a Darwin tulip. I said that "The Pearl Necklace" was steeped in white magic. There is magic here, too. You are in the presence of the unaccountable. Paint—a recognized medium—has exceeded its power. The line of the right cheek is surely the sweetest line ever traced. I don't expect you to come, a stranger to this face, and feel what I feel ; but I ask you to look at it quietly and steadily for

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a little while, in its uncoloured photographic presentment—the frontispiece to this book—until it smiles back at you again, as surely it will. Yes, even in photogravure reproductions lurk the ghosts of that smile.

Think of what has been happening in the world during the years this sweet face was set upon canvas—the evolutions and tragedies, the lives lived and ended, the whole passionate, fretted progress of the nations! “Monna Lisa” has smiled a century and more longer, and she has been looked upon every day for centuries except in that dark period when she was stolen; but this child, much more wonderful as a conquest of man over pigment, smiled unseen, for when she was bought at a Hague auction a few years ago by Herr Des Tombes for two florins thirty cents she was covered with grime. Think of it—two florins thirty cents—and if she found her way to Christie’s to-day I don’t suppose that £50,000 would buy her. But leaving aside the human interest of the picture, did you ever see, even in a reproduction, such ease as there is in this painting, such concealment of effort? It was no small thing at that day for a Dutchman to lay his colours like this, so openly and lucidly. It is as though the paint evoked life rather than counter-



THE LACE-MAKER
LOUVRE, PARIS

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feited it : as though the child had been waiting there behind the canvas to emerge at the touch of the brush-wand. No wonder that in the spring of 1921 Paris flocked to her and worshipped !

And the "View of Delft"—what is one to say of that? Here again perfection is the only word. And more than perfection, for perfection is cold. This picture is warm. Its serenity is absolute, its charm is complete. You stand before it, satisfied—except for that heightened emotion, that choking feeling and smarting eyes which perfection compels. The picture is still the last word in the painting of a town. Not all the efforts of artists since have improved upon it ; no one has done anything so beautiful. It is indeed because he painted these two pictures that I have for Jan Vermeer of Delft such a feeling of gratitude and enthusiasm. Wonderful as are many of his other pictures that I have described, they would not alone have subjected me to so much travelling in Continental trains by day and night. But to see this "Head of a Young Girl" and this "View of Delft" I would go anywhere.

To the "New Testament Allegory" I have referred above : it does not give me pleasure except in its tapestry curtain. That detail is, I

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suppose, among the wonders of painting. The other Mauritshuis Vermeer is the "Diana at Her Toilet"—that gentle, Italianized group of fair women, the painting of which Andrea himself might have overlooked. It is at once Vermeer and not Vermeer. It is very rich, very satisfying; but I, for one, should feel no sense of bereavement if another name were put to it. As a matter of fact Nicolas Maes was long held to have been its author. A fifth Vermeer the Mauritshuis chanced to possess when I was there, for Herr Bredius had recently discovered in a Brussels collection a very curious example from the magic hand—a tiny picture of a girl with a flute, in a Chinese hat (or something very like it), with an elaborate background. It is Vermeer through and through, and so modern and innovating that were it hung in a Paris or London exhibition to-day, it would look out of place only by reason of its power. The picture is seven and a half inches by six and three-quarters, and was recently in the possession of Mr. Knoedler.

After Delft, where I roamed awhile to reconstruct Vermeer's environment, but where, I regret to say, little is known of him—Brussels. For Vermeer there, one must, as in Vienna, visit the home of a

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nobleman—the Duke of Arenberg—and here again I fell into the hands of a discreet and hospitable butler. The d'Arenberg mansion is in the Rue de la Regence, just under the crest of the fashionable hill. It was then open to the picture lover, like that of Count Czernin, only on certain days. The gallery is small and chiefly Dutch, with a few good pictures in it. The Vermeer was isolated on an easel—instantly unmistakable, although so cruelly treated by time, for it is a mass of cracks. Yet through these wounds the beautiful living light of a young girl's face shines—not the girl we have seen at The Hague, but one very like her—her sister, as I like to think—dressed in the same Eastern trappings, a girl with a strangely blank forehead and eyes widely divided, akin to the type of Madonna dear to Andrea del Sarto. She is a little sad, and a little strange, this child, and only a master could have created her.

At Brussels also was—and perhaps is—one of Vermeer's "Geographers" in the collection of the Vicomte du Bus de Gisegnies; but this I did not then know. And in the Picture Gallery is the conjectural Vermeer portrait of the young man of which I have written above.

After Brussels, Paris. Paris had then one Ver-

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meer in a private collection—Baron Alphonse de Rothschild's "Astronomer," which I have not seen, and one in the Louvre—the beautiful "Dentellière"—before which I have stood scores of times. This too is very small, only a few inches square, but the serene, busy head is painted as largely as if it were in a fresco. The lighting is from the right instead of the left—a very rare experiment with Vermeer.

The London National Gallery has two Vermeers, but neither is of the highest interest. Both, however, have divine moments. "A Young Lady at the Virginals"—No. 1383—is a marvel of technique; the paint is applied with all Vermeer's charm of touch; the room is filled with the light of day; there are marvellous details, such as the brass-headed nails of the chair, and the little spot of colour on the head is fascinating; moreover, there is an agreeably ingenious scheme of blue, beginning with the gay sky of the landscape on the wall, passing through the delicate tippet of the lady and ending on a soberer note with the covering of the chair. But it is not a picture of which I am fond; it is a *tour de force*; and I think I positively hate the Cupid on the wall. One feels that Vermeer must have painted the Cupid to please the husband



A LADY WRITING A LETTER
SIR OTTO BEIT, LONDON

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of the sitter, who insisted on his pictures being immortalized. Vermeer, left to himself, would have painted a map.

The other National Gallery example, "A Lady Seated at the Virginals"—No. 2568—lacks the painter's highest radiance. It is, I think, the same girl that we saw in the Brussels picture.

Of the other London Vermeers, two belong to Sir Otto Beit. One of these is a tiny "Lady Seated at a Spinnet," not in the first rank of fascination, but a little masterpiece nevertheless, and the other "A Lady Writing a Letter," notable for the strong and beautiful painting of the lady's face, foreshortened as she bends over her task. Beside her stands her blue-aproned maid, waiting to take the missive. The table has its usual tapestry and the wall its picture, this time an old master. But the head of the lady is what one remembers—with her white cap and her pearls and her happy, prosperous countenance.

Sir Otto Beit's Vermeers are in Belgrave Square ; but in vain now one visits Hyde Park Gardens to see "The Soldier and the Laughing Girl," as one could in 1907 when it belonged to Mrs. Joseph. The girl sits at the table with a bright and merry face ; the soldier, who has borrowed his red from Peter

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de Hooch, is in the shade ; on the wall is a splendid rugged map of Holland and West Friesland. The picture is paintier than is usual with Vermeer, but very powerful and rich. Mrs. Joseph, I was told, had been forced by the importunities of collectors and dealers to have recourse to a printed refusal to sell this work ; but the dollar is very mighty and very persistent, and it is in America that the girl now laughs, in the Frick Collection in New York.

The Vermeer belonging to the King hangs in the private apartments at Windsor, but when I saw it, it was, by the courtesy of His Majesty's Surveyor of Works of Art, carried into a less sacred room of that vast and imposing fortress, to be looked upon. It is very charming, but not one of the first rank, and its coating of varnish does not improve it. But it is from the perfect hand, none the less, and there is the white Delft jug in it for the eye to return to, like a haven, after every voyage over the canvas. Great Britain also has Vermeer's "Christ in the House of Mary and Martha," which, when it was exhibited in Bond Street some few years ago, divided the experts, but is now, although not confidently, given to our painter by Dr. de Groot. This picture, which I have not seen, has in the

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reproduction much of the large, easy confidence of the "Diana and Her Toilet" at The Hague. It hangs in Skelmorlie Castle.

There are, I believe, ten Vermeers in America to-day (1921). Of these I have seen six: the two permanently at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, namely the "Woman Asleep," from the Altman Collection, and the "Woman with the Water Jug," from the Marquand; Mr. Widener's "Lady Weighing Gold," at Philadelphia; Mrs. Huntington's "Lady with the Lute"; Mrs. Jack Gardner's "Three Musicians"; and "The Soldier and the Laughing Girl," now in the Frick Collection. The Frick Collection also has "The Music Lesson" and "Mistress and Servant," which I have not seen. Nor have I seen Mr. Pierpont Morgan's example, or the late Mr. J. G. Johnson's.

Mr. Widener's "Lady Weighing Gold" is the latest absolutely authentic Vermeer to be discovered, and it brings the number of his universally-accepted pictures to thirty-seven. It came to light in 1910, through the activities of Dr. de Groot, and is probably No. 1 in the list of Vermeer's pictures sold at Amsterdam in 1696, to which we shall come later: "A Woman Weighing Gold." It represents one of those placid, domestic creatures to whom

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Vermeer's brush lent a radiance just one gleam of which many a Madonna of the Southern masters would have envied. How little can they have thought, these Delft housewives and maidens, that they were destined for such an immortality! She stands beside a table, as most of Vermeer's women do, and she has a jacket of dark-blue velvet trimmed with fur, and a white handkerchief over her head. The tablecloth also is blue; the curtain is orange. Standing there, she poises in her right hand a pair of goldsmith's scales. On the table is a profusion of pearls (painted with less miraculous dexterity than usual), and a tapestry rug has been tossed there too. Behind her serene, comely head, on the wall (where Vermeer usually places a map), a picture of the Last Judgment hangs, which may or may not be identifiable. (I should doubt if Vermeer introduced it with any ironical intention; that was not his way.) This picture is on a light grey wall. The light comes, of course, from the left, and never did this master of light paint it—or create it—more wonderfully. It triumphs through the window and curtain exactly as in "The Pearl Necklace," past the same black mirror. The woman's face, however, has the greatest lustre; it diffuses such a lambency that one might almost say that the rest



A LADY WEIGHING GOLD
MR. JOSEPH WIDENER, PHILADELPHIA

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of the picture matters nothing ; so soft and lovely a glow were enough.

I saw, in Mrs. Jack Gardner's Italian palace at Boston, "The Three Musicians," the picture being brought down and isolated for me in the cortile. It is not one of the most fascinating, but it is full of charm. Mrs. Huntington's "Lady with the Lute" was temporarily lent to the Metropolitan Museum, which, in 1920, was celebrating its fiftieth birthday, and I was enchanted by its quality. But the beauty of the Marquand example in the same building—"The Woman with the Water Jug"—is such as to dim the memory of everything else there. This picture is by far the most lovely thing I saw in America, and the most magical. Where other artists counterfeit light Vermeer kindles it, and never with more radiance than here. The work contains such a mastery of the problems of illumination and shadow—apart altogether from sheer drawing—as must make many an artist go home and burn his brushes ; and no other of Vermeer's pictures is so suffused with his marvellous blue. The jug and basin, both of polished brass, are miraculous, nothing less.

The other permanent Metropolitan example, "The Woman Asleep," is more like Maes than Vermeer but as it seems to have been among the pictures

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sold in Amsterdam in 1696, it must be accepted : that is, if the description, " A Drunken Servant, Sleeping at a Table," can be said to fit it.

Since the discovery of Mr. Widener's picture, yet another has been found—a large group of children representing Diana and her Nymphs—which Mr. Paterson, of Old Bond Street—the discoverer of " Christ in the House of Mary and Martha "—possesses, and which is now at the Sackville Gallery. It is, if Vermeer painted it, obviously an early and immature work, and is on a larger scale than most of the others : it has weaknesses of drawing, and in more than one respect suggests an experimental stage ; but one is inclined to accept its authorship. Everywhere it is interesting, and here and there remarkable, especially in the figure of the child in the left-hand corner. Mr. Roger Fry, who described it in the *Burlington Magazine*, considers it a genuine example.

Putative Vermeers are, of course, continually turning up. I have seen several very recently, and none were satisfactory. A still-life attributed to Vermeer was reproduced recently in the *Burlington Magazine*, but the experts will have none of it. The first catalogue of Mr. Widener's pictures contained three Vermeers, all of which were painted by other

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men. They disappeared, like the half-gods, when the "Woman Weighing Gold" came along. An authority whose opinions must be respected believes that Vermeer's hand is to be seen in the picture of "Card Players"—No. 1247 in the National Gallery, which is credited to Maes. But I personally cannot agree. In any case it does not matter. None of these questionable Vermeers matter. The only things that matter are the unmistakable Vermeers, so beautiful and distinguished and masterly as to take the breath away.

V

Vermeer's practically unquestionable output totals thirty-seven pictures. Think of the smallness of the harvest. Thirty-seven! That is to say, hardly more for Vermeer's whole career than the Boningtons to be seen in a single London collection—that at Hertford House—where there are thirty-five of his works. And Bonington died at the age of twenty-seven. How many pictures by Bonington exist I know not, but hundreds, I suppose, in all. And Vermeer has only thirty-seven or thirty-eight to his name, and lived nearly twice as long, and had all those children to support.

The question that confronts us then, is, *Where are*

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the others? Because there must have been others : indeed we know of a few, as I will presently show ; but there must have been many others, since Vermeer began to paint when he was young, and painted till the end, and had a working period of, say, twenty-three years—between 1652, when he was twenty, and 1675, when he died. At the modest rate of only four pictures a year this would give him a total of ninety-two pictures, or over fifty more than we know of. But putting his output at a lower rate—say at two pictures a year—that would leave us with several still to discover. Of the existence at one time of two, if not more, of these, we have absolute knowledge, gained from the catalogue of the Vermeer sale in Amsterdam in 1696, which I copy from an article by Dr. Hofstede de Groot in the *Burlington Magazine* in 1910. Three times, I should first state, was there a Vermeer sale. Once, in 1677, two years after the artist's death, when the dealer, Coelenbier, of Haarlem, sold twenty-six of his works. Then in 1682, the painter Dissius, of Delft, dying, left nineteen Vermeers, which were put up at auction. And then, at Amsterdam, in 1696, came the sale of twenty-one, of which, as Dr. de Groot shows, most are identifiable to-day. Dr. de Groot thinks that some of the pictures were in all three



MISTRESS AND SERVANT
FRICK COLLECTION, NEW YORK

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sales. Otherwise there would be a grand total of fifty-six to make us envious—or eighteen or nineteen more than are known about. This is the catalogue of the auction held at Amsterdam on May 16th, 1696, priced and annotated, with the present homes of the pictures conjecturally added.

1. *A Woman Weighing Gold*—in a case, painted in an extraordinary skilful and strong manner—fl.155 (normally £12 18s. 4d. Now in Mr. Widener's collection, in Philadelphia).

2. *A Maidservant Pouring out Milk*—exceedingly good—fl.175 (£14 11s. 8d. Now in the Ryks Museum).

3. *The Portrait of Vermeer*—in a room, with rich accessories, painted in an unusually fine style—fl.45 (£3 15s. Now in the Czernin Collection).

4. *A Lady Playing the Guitar*—very well painted—fl.70 (£5 16s. 8d. Now in the late John G. Johnston's collection in Philadelphia).

5. *An Interior*—with a gentleman washing his hands, with a vista and figures ; painted in a skilful and unusual style—fl.95 (£7 18s. 4d. Unidentified).

6. *An Interior*—with a lady at the Virginals and a gentleman listening—fl.80 (£6 13s. 4d. Now in Windsor Castle).

7. *A Lady to whom a Maidservant is bringing a Letter*—fl.70 (£5 16s. 8d. Now in the Ryks Museum ; or perhaps the picture in the Frick Collection in New York).

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8. *A Drunken Maidservant, asleep behind a table*—fl.16 (£1 6s. 8d. Now in the Metropolitan Museum in New York).

9. *An Interior, with Revellers*—well painted in a strong manner—fl.73 (£6 1s. 8d. Unidentified).

10. *An Interior*—with a gentleman making music, and a lady—fl.81 (£6 15s. Unidentified, or possibly the picture in the Frick Collection).

11. *A Soldier with a Laughing Girl*—very fine—fl.44½ (£3 14s. 2d. Now in the Frick Collection).

12. *A Girl Making Lace*—fl.28 (£2 6s. 8d. Now in the Louvre).

[Pictures by other painters came here.]

31. *A View of Delft, from the South*—fl.200 (£16 13s. 4d. Now in the Mauritshuis).

32. *A View of a House in Delft*—fl.72½ (£6 os. 10d. Lately in the Six Collection in Amsterdam, now in the Ryks Museum).

33. *A View of some Houses*—fl.48 (£4. Unidentified).

35. *A Lady Writing*—very well painted—fl.63 (£5 5s. Possibly in Sir Otto Beit's collection, but more probably Mr. J. Pierpont Morgan's example).

36. *A Lady adorning Herself*—fl.39 (£3 5s. Now in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum, Berlin).

37. *A Lady Playing the Spinnet*—fl.42. 10 (£3 10s. 10d. Now in the National Gallery, or the example in Sir Otto Beit's collection).

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38. *A Portrait in an Antique Costume*—painted in an unusual and skilful manner—fl.36 (£3. Probably the “Head of a Young Girl,” in the Mauritshuis).

39. Another similar Portrait—fl.17 (£1 8s. 4d. Now in the Arenberg collection, Brussels).

40. A Pendant to the last—fl.17 (£1 8s. 4d. Unidentified).

This leaves us with four of the Amsterdam sale pictures to discover—No. 5, No. 9, No. 15, and No. 40. And, of course, certain of those which Dr. de Groot identifies may be variants of the pictures which are known, for Vermeer was limited in his choice of subjects and often nearly repeated himself.

And there is always—somewhere—the “*Dévi-deuse*.” Perhaps it is in England; it was there in 1865, as we know from an article on Vermeer contributed to the *Gazette des Beaux Arts* in the following year, by Thoré, the French collector and critic, who wrote under the pseudonym W. Bürger. Theophile Etienne Joseph Thoré was one of the earliest Vermeer enthusiasts—I think he came before Henri Havard, the traveller, also a Frenchman—and the owner of two or three of his best pictures. “The Pearl Necklace” in Berlin was, for instance, his, and his also one of the National Gallery examples, the “Young Lady at the Virginals.” But it has to

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be mentioned that his collection contained a great many pictures not by Vermeer but attributed to him.

Now as to the "Dévideuse," or "Spinner." Thoré thus describes it in his catalogue of Vermeers, true or spurious, in the *Gazette des Beaux Arts*: "An old woman seated in front of her skein-winder. Full length figure, nearly natural size." The measurements are 1 m. 30 by 1 m. 10, which is 52 inches by 44. He goes on to say that it was Sir Charles Eastlake, then Director of the National Gallery, who drew his attention to this picture, and he quotes, in French, from the following letter (undated) from Eastlake, which I have put into English. Eastlake wrote to Thoré:

" . . . As regards the Van der Meer of Delft, this is what happened: Mr. Phillips had spoken to me of a work by this master, which he knew of in the country. His description having aroused in me a desire to see the picture, it was sent to London. It is of an old woman, seated, nearly in profile, her hands joined, resting in her lap. In front of her, to the right, some hemp wound round a frame (the winder). The figure is slightly smaller than natural size. The background of wall is quite clear, almost without form, and one would almost mistake it



A WOMAN WITH A WATER JUG
METROPOLITAN MUSEUM, NEW YORK

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for sky were it not for several things suspended on nails, with light shadows added. The foreground is equally clear, hardly to be distinguished from the wall. In consequence, the figure stands out well. I had no doubt as to the artist, and later I took Dr. Waagen (who is at present with me) to see it. He also had not the least doubt that it was by Van der Meer of Delft. Price, 150 guineas. This price is reasonable. But the picture is not of such excellence as I seek. I hope sooner or later you will find a perfect picture for the National Gallery. . . .”

From the last sentence we may suppose that Thoré was always on the look-out for good things for England.

Commenting on Eastlake's remarks, Thoré says : “ On that my friend Mr. Phillips forwarded me the picture, adding that he considered it a very important work of this rare master, and I showed it to several artists, who were astonished. But the size—and the price, a little too high for me, about 4,000 francs—dismayed me, and I sent this beautiful painting back to London ; to-day [early in the 1860's] it is mislaid in England, and I should be glad to find it again. But it is necessary to add to Sir Charles Eastlake's description one very in-

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teresting peculiarity, which neither he nor M. Waagen seems to have noticed : one of the trinkets suspended on the wall, a kind of small winder in wood, is in the exact form of Vermeer's monogram.

"I have," Thoré adds, "a photograph of this picture," but he does not include it among the illustrations to his article, and where his papers now are—he died in 1869—I have no knowledge. If they exist the photograph is probably among them, and it might tell the modern expert if the search for the "Dévideuse" were worth prosecuting. Dr. Hofstede de Groot, who tracked the "Woman Weighing Gold" and who has analysed with such care the claims of so many *soi-disant* Vermeers, would be able to pronounce judgment probably at once. In his *Catalogue of Dutch Painters*, 1907, he passes eighty-seven possible Vermeers under review and finds only thirty-six to satisfy him. The "Woman Weighing Pearls" is the thirty-seventh. I have not heard his opinion of Mr. Paterson's "Diana."

Now, I hold that to track down the "Dévideuse," whether Vermeer painted it or not, is as desirable an act as to scale Mount Everest or reach either Pole.

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VI

Among the thirty-seven pictures that are universally accepted, although there are many interiors such as the painter loved, there is, remember, only one pure landscape, only one religious subject, only one real portrait, only one street scene, only one kitchen scene, only one purely classical subject. The loneliness of these examples fills one with a kind of fury. No painter, and especially no painter with such an interest in the difficulties of his art, such a painter's painter, so to speak, as Vermeer, and moreover a man with many children and a clamorous baker—no painter paints only one landscape, especially when the result is so commandingly successful as the "View of Delft." Where are the others? (M. Vanzype found a replica, but it is not generally accepted.) No painter is satisfied with one attempt at a beautiful façade. Where are the others? No painter paints only one classical subject. Where are the others? (Mr. Paterson's example is only half classical: classical, with a domestic flavour; a family scene in masquerade, to be exact.) No painter paints only one religious subject. Where are the others? No painter paints

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only one portrait pure and simple as distinguished from portrait and *genre*. Where are the others ?

Vermeer himself, of course, may have destroyed some, as Claude Monet once destroyed a number of his. But I do not think so ; he could not have afforded to, and he was not that kind. No : they still exist somewhere. And the question where they are brings us back to the question of the millionaires. What are the millionaires going to do about it ? Had I this wealth I would furnish expeditions to hunt among the by-ways of Northern Europe—not neglecting Norfolk—in the hope of coming upon another work by that exquisite Delft hand. (But of course the lost pictures may be anywhere. The “Christ in the House of Mary and Martha,” for example, was found in a dealer’s at Bristol and changed hands, I am informed, at £9.) On such an enterprise of discovery would I spend my money. And, incidentally, what charming adventures one would have, and what subsidiary treasure one would gather ! That would be an expedition worth making, even if the prime object of the search always eluded us.

